

Congressman Fighting to Prevent Cuts to LIHEAP Program

Kingston, NY -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today announced that the application period for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) will begin on Wednesday, November 16, 2011. The congressman made the announcement at the Ulster County Social Services building where the local program is administered, noting that thousands in the Hudson Valley can benefit from the program this year despite a proposal to cut the program by nearly one-third.

"With colder weather approaching and the first snow having already fallen, a lot of Hudson Valley families are worried about how they will pay for heat this winter," said Hinchey. "Even though the cost of home heating oil has risen by 7 percent this year, there are many in Washington who are attempting to cut this program. In fact, proposals made in the House and Senate would slash funding for heating assistance by nearly one-third. This is a huge mistake and it's going to seriously hurt Ulster County where the cost of rent has risen by nearly 11 percent on account of the high foreclosure rate. This is the wrong cut at exactly the wrong time, and I'm fighting to restore funding so that Ulster County residents don't need to choose between feeding their families and staying warm during the winter months."

To be eligible for the program, families must have incomes below 150 percent of the poverty level, or approximately \$34,000 per year for a family of four. Questions about eligibility, however, should be directed to Ulster County Social Services, which can be reached at 845-334-5045. Congressman Hinchey's Kingston office, which can be reached at 845-331-4466, can also assist with other questions about the program.

Statewide, over 1.5 million households — or approximately one in five — relied on LIHEAP to help pay their heating bills last winter. In Ulster County, 12,769 households received assistance from the program last year. Nationwide, nearly 9 million families receive LIHEAP every year.

In Fiscal Year 2011, \$4.7 Billion was provided for the LIHEAP program. The current proposal before the House and Senate would cut funding back to \$3.4 billion. Hinchey, a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, recently joined 87 of his House colleagues in a call for an extension of the 2011 funding levels.

Hinchey said that if the cuts become law, families will need to rely on other resources that can help lower heating expenses. For instance, utility companies can create payment plans that allow families to more easily manage with limited resources. Many utility companies also have programs funded through customer donations that can help lower costs.

The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority also offers programs that provide cost-effective home improvements. Eligible households can receive up to 50 percent of the cost of an approved energy efficiency project. Eligible renters and homeowners can also receive home improvements that will lower electrical costs, particularly through lighting and refrigerator replacements, as well as other cost-effective home performance strategies, including insulation installation. There is no cost to the customer to participate in this program.

Finally, the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal has a Weatherization Assistance program that will assist low income families with installing energy efficiency measures that will help lower their heating and electric costs.